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## CHRISTMAS IN EARLY INDIANAPOLIS.

*BY B. R. SULGROVE.*

[Of early Christmas observance in Indiana very little has been published, we believe, in local histories or elsewhere; for which reason this forgotten newspaper contribution of Mr. Sulgrove's has a distinctive interest.—**EDITOR.**]

The Christmas of the pioneers of the "New Purchase" varied a little with the difference of nativity. Those from the East brought with them a larger infusion of the religious element than those from the States below the Mason and Dixon's line. Puritan heredity put a sort of ban on Christmas festivities as it did on plays and circus performances. \* \* \* The Southern settlers from "Old Virginia," the Carolinas, Tennessee and Kentucky, were less demonstrative in their religious tendencies and more frank in avowing and exhibiting their taste for fun. There was nothing said or done in the holiday observances of this class more reprehensible than the more sedate entertainments of the other, but it was the unrestrained "whoop and hurra" of a jolly good time that repelled the more visibly pious people. The latter went to church while the others went to shooting matches, and the boys and girls played the household games familiar then, but forgotten now.

Dancing was a pretty invariable part of the Christmas observances of the "unconverted." The cotillion, as the writer recalls his experiences, was the favorite dance of a large company, but reels and jigs were common in smaller crowds. These were distinguished by names loudly tinted with the extravagance of western humor, as "hoe-downs," "puncheon splitters," and so on. There was no waltzing. Very few of the pioneers ever saw a waltz or any kind of "fancy dancing." It was all straightforward stamping and jumping in time to the music, and that was always of the liveliest kind. None of the airs played in early days by Bill Bagwell or Jo Rouse or old "Dosedo" (a nickname derived from his calling a dancing figure in French, spelled "dos a dos"—back to back) are ever heard now: "Macdonald's Reel," commonly called "Leather Breeches," was one tune of the ballroom that is preserved in music books, and "Miss McLeod's Reel" is another.

One of the games frequently employed in Christmas diversions was played by a blindfolded lady or gentleman who sat in a chair to guess whether any article that another player held over his or her head belonged to a man or woman. The question was, "Heavy hangs over your head, fine or superfine?" "Superfine" meant that the article belonged to a woman, "fine" to a man. A correct guess gave the blindfold guesser the right to designate a forfeit. "Blindman's buff" was common, too; and, when playing out of doors was pleasant, a game something like the schoolboys' "prisoners' base" was frequently substituted for the less active games.

Shooting matches usually took the form of turkey shooting. As it was practiced here, the turkey was set against a stump or a tree and held in place by a log rolled up against him, which concealed all the bird but the head. At this the marksman fired at the customary distance of sixty yards, at ten, fifteen or twenty-five cents a shot. Rests were prohibited, and so rigid was the rule that a skilful shot from Lafayette by the name of Hotchkiss was not allowed to hold his ramrod in his hand with the barrel of his rifle on it, though neither was nearer the ground than the hand itself. Some of the first-class marksmen would hit a turkey's head at sixty yards two times out of three, and occasionally a man like R. B. Duncan would have half a dozen turkeys to divide among his friends. As these matches gradually disappeared, the celebration of Christmas came nearer uniformity on both sides of the line of religious feeling. The Puritan rigidity relaxed and the Southern laxity stiffened, and Christmas became what it is now, about equally compounded of religious feeling and social enjoyment.

It may be noticed here that a form of diversion was kept up for some years on Christmas, and occasionally through the year, that one rarely hears of now, except in sketches of Southern life. That was "gander pulling." In the vicinity of Allisonville, near the north boundary of the county, a couple of farmers at times provided a tough old gander for the fun, stripped his neck of feathers and soaped it, and strung him by the legs to a stout, springing limb of a hardy tree for the country boys to ride at, catch by the greased neck, and try to jerk loose from the limb. It was made profitable in a small way by the owners of the gander, usually a farmer named Lashbrook and his neighbor, Deford.